

## Small Group Study Guide for Revelation Chapters 2



### OVERVIEW OF FIRST 5 CHAPTERS OF THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation starts with a large, holy vision of Jesus in chapter 1. He is clothed with such glory and splendor that the apostle John falls down as though dead. It would be easy to skip chapters 2 and 3 and go directly from the vision of Jesus to the vision of the throne room in heaven in chapters 4 and 5. Right in between these two overwhelming visions John records *seven letters to seven churches*. Throughout the entire book of Revelation John is pushing language to its breaking point. He is trying his best to describe the indescribable. But the letters are the exception. They are practical and include encouragement and correction. These churches needed to hear from Jesus. So do we.

**PURPOSE OF THE LETTERS:** To show the spiritual needs of these first century churches, and by analogy, all churches (the number seven of perfection and completion). John's ministry in his old age was in Asia Minor, especially in Ephesus. John is obviously well acquainted with these churches and cities. These letters show the ethical aspect of Christianity. They are a call to faithfulness and godliness. The church will also be judged one day. A different kind of judgment than the wicked, but a judgement still. **2 Corinthians 5:9-10** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.



## CHURCH #1 EPHESUS 2:1-7

OPEN WITH PRAYER & CATCH UP A BIT.

2:1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. 2 " 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and

are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

Ephesus was the largest city of the Roman province of Asia Minor. It was not the capital, though the Roman governor lived there. It was a commercial center because of its excellent natural harbor. It was a free city, which allowed it to have local government and much freedom, including no garrison of Roman soldiers.

Ephesus was the site of the Temple to Artemis (Diana in Latin), which was one of the seven wonders of the world of its day. It was 425' x 220' with 127 columns which were 60' tall; 86 of them were overlaid with gold. The image of Artemis was thought to have been a meteor which resembled a many breasted female figure. This meant that there were many cultic prostitutes present in the city (see Acts 19). It was a very immoral, multicultural city.

Tradition asserts that it became John's home after Mary's death in Palestine (remember Jesus with the two of them at the cross).

It was through this church that the entire region would hear the gospel message. This could be why the Apostle Paul spent two years there which was more time than anywhere else. His ministry there was very effective. The beginning of the church is recorded in Acts 19. Between Acts 19, Ephesians, and Revelation 2 we have more recorded about the church in Ephesus than any other church.

The church started with a great revival. These new Christians burned all their books representing their past pagan beliefs. In today's value they burned millions of dollars in books. Knowing how the church started helps bring clarity to the letter in Revelation. They were repentant from their past. Their repentance wasn't just with words but with action. They are devoted to Jesus. This is what makes the comment in Revelation so striking "they lost their first love."

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you started out on fire for Jesus, completely repented, changed by grace - then over the years of life getting to you - you lose sight of how you started?

2. How can the Christian life become more mundane than exciting? How can church become more of a chore than a place of worship?

3. Discuss all the positives Jesus had to say about the church.

Would He be able to say the same thing about your Christian life?

4. Discuss the ways the church at Ephesus has fallen short. Read Acts 19:17-20.

What did the church do at the beginning that Jesus was turning them back to?

5. How do you keep the passion and enthusiasm alive in your life for following Jesus?

6. In what ways can the monotony of life drain your passion for Jesus?

7. If Jesus were to write you a letter telling you to turn back to the way you started, what would be in that letter?

**Close with praying for each other.**

## EPHESUS EXTRA STUDY FOR YOU - IF YOU WANT:)

### 2:1

"the angel" The Hebrew and Greek term for angel can mean messenger. It could refer to the pastor (Mal. 2:7), the angel of the church (remember Daniel 10), or the unique spirit or character of the individual congregations.

"church" This Greek compound term ekklesia is a combination of two Greek terms, "out of" and "to call." It was used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament to translate the Hebrew term for "assembly of Israel." Early Christians used it to designate themselves because they saw themselves as the people of God, like Israel and they saw themselves as divinely called by God both for salvation and ministry to the world.

"The One who holds the seven stars" This is a description of Jesus taken from 1:16. These seven stars referred to the churches (1:20). The term "holds" speaks of a firm, sure grasp (John 10:28). Nothing and no one could separate these churches from Jesus (Rom. 8:31-39) except their own refusal to repent and follow Him! Only unbelief can separate.

"who walks among" This metaphor is used in Gen. 3:8 as a symbol of God's presence with mankind (also in Lev. 26:12).

"the golden lampstands" some see this as a reference to the Jewish Menorah of the Tabernacle, but others see it as another symbol for the seven churches (1:12-13).

"the words of Him" It is interesting that Jesus' last words to His church are not Matt. 28:18-20 or Acts 1:7-11, but Revelation chapters 2-3 and possibly, depending how you see the communication from the angel on behalf of Jesus, Revelation chapter 22.

### 2:2

"I know" Jesus sees, understands, and cares for His churches. His concern involves both affirmation and discipline (which is a form of parental love). This same phrase is repeated in all seven letters. The Old Testament background of this term implies intimate, personal relationship (Gen 4:1; Jer. 1:5).

"your works, your toil" This was an active church, but they had forgotten the priority of fellowship with Christ (2:4). Too many good things had robbed them of the best (Gal. 3:1).

"your patient endurance" or **perseverance**. This term implies a voluntary, active, steadfast endurance. This is a major theme of the book of Revelation (1:9; 2:2,3,19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). Perseverance must be balanced with security (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,11-12,21). Many biblical truths are presented in seemingly paradoxical pairs. Both are equally true, but neither is true alone. For example our salvation is an initial repentance and faith followed by lifestyle repentance, faith, obedience, service, and steadfastness. See Special Topic below.

"those who are evil" This word is often used of "evil people" but is used only twice in Revelation, here and 16:2, where it is used to describe the results of the "bowls of the wrath of God" (horrible sores).

"have tested those" to test with either good or bad intentions (2:2,10; 3:10). The balance is found in I John 4:1 where believers are to test with a view toward approval of those who claim to speak for God. The call for believers to examine those who claim to speak for God is found in both Testaments (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:22; Matt. 7:15-23; I John 4:1-6).

There is tension in the NT related to believers critically judging each other (Matt. 7:1-5).

However, Christians are called to evaluate each other for leadership roles (Matt. 7:5,6,15;

I Cor. 5:1-12; I Timothy 3; I John 4:1-6). Attitude and motive are the keys to proper evaluation (Gal. 6:1; Rom. 2:1-11; 14:1-23; James 4:11-12).

**"those who call themselves apostles"** This use of the term "apostles" does not refer to The Twelve, but to the wider use of the term (Acts 14:14; Rom. 16:7; I Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; Eph. 4:11; I Thess. 2:6). The NT often addresses the subject of false apostles or teachers (Matt. 7:15-16; 24:24; Acts 20:29; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; I John 4:1 and throughout the Pastoral Epistles). This church had correctly identified these false apostles and rejected them.

## 2:3

This church was faithful amidst difficult circumstances, even persecutions. They had not denied Christ or grown weary in well-doing (Gal. 6:9; Heb. 12:3; James 5:7-8).

## 2:4

**"you have abandoned the love you had at first."** There have been several theories as to what this meant.

1. It means love for Christ.
2. It means love for one another.
3. It means love for the lost.
4. It combines all three of the above.
5. Some think it is related to the problem of second generation believers (Judges 2: 7-10).
6. Some see it as a loveless church of cold orthodoxy (I Corinthians 13).

## 2:5

**"remember"** This carries the idea of "always keep in mind." Believers are often admonished to remember their previous condition in sin and their new position in the grace and mercies of God through Christ.

**"repent, and do the works you did at first"** Notice the church as a whole is called on to make a decisive repentance (2 Chronicles 7:14) and to become active in its love for Christ, for each other, and for the lost. Repentance is crucial for a faith relationship with God (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; 6:12; Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 20:21).

The Hebrew term meant a change of **actions**, while in Greek it meant a change of **mind**.

Repentance is a willingness to change from one's self-centered existence to a life informed and directed by God. It calls for a turning from the priority and bondage of the self. Basically it is a new attitude, a new worldview, a new master. Repentance is God's will for every fallen child of Adam, made in His image (Ezek. 18:21,23,32 and 2 Pet. 3:9).

A N.T. passage which reflects the different Greek terms for repentance is 2 Corinthians 7:8-12.

1. "grief" or "sorrowing" vv. 8 (twice), 9 (3 times), 10 (twice), 11
2. "regret," "suffer loss" vv. 8 (twice), 9
3. "repent," vv. 9, 10

The contrast is between a false repentance (regret, like Judas, Matt. 27:3 and Esau, Heb. 12:16-17) and a true repentance (repent, like Peter, John 21:15-23; Matt. 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62).

True repentance is linked to **Jesus'** preaching on the conditions of the New Covenant in Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3,5, the **Apostolic** sermons in Acts (Acts 3:16,19; 20:21), **God's** sovereign gift (Acts 5:31; 11:18 and 2 Tim. 2:25), and **perishing** (2 Pet. 3:9)

Repentance is not optional!

"I will come to you" This is a common theme in Revelation; Christ is coming soon (1: 2,3; 2: 5,16; 25; 3:3,11). In the OT the coming of God could bring blessing or judgment. In this context Christ was coming to discipline His church (1 Pet. 4:17)!

"and remove your lampstand from its place" The lampstand symbolizes the entire church at Ephesus. This may have involved the removal of Christ's presence and blessing. The entire congregation was not facing apostasy, but the loss of their effective ministry. This also applies to the churches of Pergamum (2:16); Thyatira (2:22-23); Sardis (3:3); and Laodicea (3:19). It is possible that each of these churches were affected by a Nicolaitan type of false teaching which promoted compromise with pagan culture.

## 2:6

"you hate the works of the Nicolaitans" There has been much speculation about who these Nicolaitans were and what they believed. The only biblical source we have is Rev. 2:6, 14-15. Speculation began early in the Church around a.d. 180. Irenaeus, in his book, *Contra-heresies*, 3:11:7, assumed that they were followers of the Cyrenian Gnosticism of the second century. Eusebius, in his book, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3:29:1, said that this particular sect did not last long.

In 2:14-15, the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans are similar. Both were encouraging believers to participate in pagan worship practices which involved ritual sexual activity. In this sense the Nicolaitans and Balaamites (Num. 25:1-9; 31:16-18) are very similar to the teachings of Jezebel (2:20).

## 2:7

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" This admonition is repeated throughout the letters to the seven churches (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). It was a phrase that came from the words of Jesus (Matt. 11:15; 13:9,43). Spiritual truth must be responded to by mind and hand. This is similar to the Hebrew term *shema*, "hear so as to do" (Deut. 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9-10).

"To the one who conquers" There is a continuing emphasis on the perseverance of believers (2:7,11,17,25-26; 3:4-5,11-12,21). conquering is the experiential evidence of a true conversion (Matt. 24:13; Gal. 6:9).

"I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." This is an obvious allusion to a tree in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:9). As humans began in fellowship with God and with the animals in a garden, so the Bible ends in the same manner (Isa. 11:6-9; Rev. 22:2,14,19). The term "**paradise**" was a Persian word for a nobleman's walled garden, which was used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible to translate the Garden of Eden (Ezek. 28:13; 31:8). It is one of the many references to the coming Messianic age that is found throughout the letters to the seven churches. The term "paradise" is used in two senses: (1) in Luke 23:43 it refers to the righteous part of Sheol/Hades. On the cross Jesus tells the repentant thief that he would be with Him there that day and (2) in 2 Cor. 12:3 it refers to God's presence, God's heavenly throne room ("the third heaven"). God's purpose for mankind, made in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27), has always been eternal life. The fall of Genesis 3 and the rest of the Bible document God's commitment to mankind's redemption and eternal fellowship with Him. This fallen world, this gap in full fellowship, was not God's desire, but mankind's shame. God will restore creation for His purposes.





## CHURCH #2 SMYRNA 2:8-11

OPEN WITH PRAYER & CATCH UP A BIT.

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. 9 " 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not fear what you are

about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

Smyrna was supposedly founded by an Amazon (strong woman leader) named Smyrna. In John's day it was a city of about 200,000. It was located on the Aegean Sea. It had an ideal natural harbor and was, therefore, a commercial center surpassed only by Ephesus in Asia Minor. It was a very wealthy city.

Smyrna was a center of worship of the goddess Roma (195 b.c.) and Emperor worship. It had the first temple to Emperor Tiberius (A.D. 26). It was a religious center with the worship of Cybele and the pantheon of Homer. There was even a tradition that Homer was born here. Its many temples were located on the Acropolis called Pagos with a golden road between the Temple of Zeus and Cybele.

Smyrna had a large active "anti-Christian" Jewish population. It was the city in which Polycarp (John the Apostle's disciple) was martyred in a.d. 155.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Jesus describes himself to the church as "the first and the last, who died and came to life." Why would this description be particularly meaningful to the church in Smyrna? Read **Matthew 10:28-33** to help answer the question.

2. Jesus warns them that affliction will last for 10 days. You might say, *well at least it's only 10 days*. But notice He calls them to be faithful unto death. The threat of violence and death because of their faith was a real possibility. Is that reality difficult for us to process?

How might we address/apply it in our currently free society?

The fear of death has plagued the human race throughout history. But, because Jesus has conquered death and reigns forever, those who belong to him have nothing to fear.

Dr. Robert Mounce put it this way,

*"Since murder is the last resort, what can be done about those who rise from the dead?"*

Our answer - Nothing!

3. Around the world, we have brothers and sisters who are suffering physically, emotionally, economically, and relationally because of their faith in Jesus. sometimes we feel helpless to do anything at all for them. But wait, isn't there something powerful we can do?

Take some time to pray for the churches in countries you know of that are being persecuted.

4. Most of us don't compromise in our faith because we are afraid of being killed. We compromise for far less than that.

In which areas of life do you think Christians most feel the pressure to compromise?  
From where does that pressure come?

example: *in the area of sexuality*. They feel pressure from the media and Hollywood.  
Not to mention their friends at work.

example: *in the area of finances*. Times are tough and many people think that if they give their money back to God, there won't be enough for themselves.

example:

example:

5. personal one: In which area of life do you feel pressure to compromise? Where does that pressure come from?

6. How do you feel led to respond to this week's message and text? Are there steps of obedience you feel the Spirit asking you to take?

**Close with praying for each other.**



## **SMYRNA EXTRA STUDY FOR YOU - IF YOU WANT:)**

### **2:8**

"words of the first and the last" synonymous with the phrase "I am the Alpha and Omega" (1:8; 21:6; 27:13) and "the beginning and the end" (21:6; 22:13).

"who died and came to life" This may have been a slap at the nature cult of Cybele, the mother goddess. Many of the ancient fertility religions based their worldview on personified cycles of nature, winter death, and spring rebirth. In 1:18; 5:6, Jesus is the lamb that was slain but is now alive. It emphasizes Jesus' once-for-all (not repeated) substitutionary death and resurrection (Heb. 7:27; 9:12,28; 10:10).

### **2:9**

"I know your tribulation and your poverty" These are two very strong Greek words. They are significant because the city of Smyrna was very prosperous. The fact that the church was poor seems to imply economic persecution. In the book of the Revelation believers suffer "tribulations" from unbelievers and the evil one, but unbelievers suffer "the wrath of God." Believers are always protected (sealed) from divine judgment.

"(but you are rich)" Believers should not judge their standing in Christ by worldly standards (Matt. 6:33).

"slander" This is literally the term "blasphemy," which had an OT connotation of "to revile" and was usually used in connection with verbal attacks on YaHWeH (Lev. 24:13-23). In context these Jewish religionists claim to know God ("bless God"), but they do not (Matt. 7:21-23).

"those who say that they are Jews and are not" A very similar phrase is used in 3:9; there it is obvious that they are racial Jews who claim to be God's people but really are not (John 8:44; Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:29; 6:16). From Acts and Galatians we know that the Jews caused great opposition to the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5).

"a synagogue of Satan" John saw the world in sharp contrast, God versus Satan. Satan is mentioned often in the book (2:9,13; 3:9; 12:9,10; 20:2,7). He slanders the believers & energizes their persecutors. This conflict in the spiritual realm characterizes apocalyptic literature. There is a battle for control of the hearts & minds of the children of Adam.

### **2:10**

"Do not fear" This carries the idea of stopping an act already in process. These churches were afraid. Persecutions, however, are a sign of their salvation and God's blessings (Matt. 5:10-12).

"the devil is about to throw some of you into prison" Behind evil human leaders lurks a supernatural personal force of evil (Eph. 6:10-19). The term Satan is an OT title and description. His God-given task was to provide a rebellious, self-centered alternative to mankind and thereby accuse them when they yield to temptation (Genesis 3; Job 1-2; Zechariah 3). There is a development of evil in the OT. Satan was created as a servant and progressed into an enemy.

It is an assumption by interpreters that the highly figurative language of Isaiah 14, which directly refers to the arrogant King of Babylon, and Ezekiel 28, which directly refers to the prideful King of Tyre, ultimately identifies the spiritual pride and fall of Satan. The language of Ezekiel 28 is taken from a description of the Garden of Eden. It is difficult to accept a description of a human, historical, pagan king in angelic terms taken from Eden (Genesis 3).

However, Ezekiel does the very same thing with the King of Egypt in chapter 31. He is described as a huge tree in the garden of Eden.

All believers long for more information, especially about the origins of God, angels, and evil. We should be cautious of turning metaphorical, prophetic descriptions into dogmatic theology. Some of our modern theology comes from isolated, figurative texts mixed with modern concepts, both theological and literary (for example Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*).

In the NT he is called the devil (12:9,12; 20:2,10), which is a composite Greek term meaning "to throw across," "to slander," or "bring accusations against." This again reflects his task of accusing and tempting. These terms are synonymous in Revelation (12:9; 20:2).

**"that you may be tested"** Tested is used in two senses:

- (1) believers are tested so as to show their true faith and grow stronger (2:10; Acts 14:27; Rom. 5:3-4; 8:17-19; Heb. 5:8; James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 4:12-19)
- (2) unbelievers are tested to show their unbelief and deserved judgment (3:10). In Revelation the Christian's trials are called "tribulations", while the unbelievers are subjected to "the wrath of God."

There were two Greek terms that can be translated "test," "try," or "tempt." One had the connotation of **"to test with a view toward destruction"** (peirasmos, peirasmo). The other terms (dokimos, dokimazo) were used with the connotation of **"to test with a view toward approval."** Satan tempts to destroy; God tests to strengthen (1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Pet. 1:7; Gen. 22:1; Exod. 16:4; 20:20; Deut. 8:2,16; 13:3; Jdgs. 2:22; 2 Chr. 32:31).

**"ten days"** There has been much speculation about the phrase "ten days": Some say that it referred to a literal ten day period of persecution in the city of Smyrna in John's day. Others say that because ten is the number of completion, it simply meant a complete number of days of persecution. Some say that it referred to an unspecified period of persecution. The good news is that it has a limit. The persecution will end!

However, in an apocalyptic book one is never sure if the numbers are used figuratively or literally. If the number was often used in the OT and interbiblical apocalyptic literature with a symbolic meaning then probably it is figurative. The most often used symbolic numbers are 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12 and their multiples like 40.

**"be faithful unto death"** This emphasizes the believer's need to continue in faith even if it means physical death (Matt. 2:13; 12:11; 10:22; 24:13; Luke 12:4; Gal. 6:9). Some believers were and are killed. This is the paradox of the sovereignty of God and our experience in a fallen world.

**"and I will give you the crown of life"** This is the victor's crown called the "stephanos" (same as in 1 Cor. 9:25). It was the reward of Christian martyrs. We learn from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, 4:15, that there were many martyrs, including Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna. There are also other crowns (rewards) mentioned in the New Testament (2 Tim. 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 3:11).

## **2:11**

**"will not be hurt by the second death"** God's ultimate care for those who are martyred (12:11). The "second death" referred to hell or eternal separation from fellowship with God (Rev. 20:6,14; 21:8).



## CHURCH #3 PERGAMUM 2:12-17

### OPEN WITH PRAYER & CATCH UP A BIT

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. 13 " 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where

Satan dwells. 14 But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. 15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'

Pergamum was a large wealthy city and the capital of Asia Minor (since 282 b.c.), although not located on a major trade road. It boasted of the largest library in the Roman world outside of Alexandria, Egypt. It had over 200,000 parchment scrolls! Vellum was invented here. It was processed animal skins which were used for writing. This writing medium was developed because Alexandria, Egypt, refused to sell them papyrus reeds. This was because the Pergamum king, Eumenes II (197-159 b.c.) tried to hire Alexandria's librarian, Aristophanes. When the Ptolemaic king, Epiphanes (205-182 b.c.) of Alexandria found out, he arrested the librarian and embargoed papyri from Pergamum. There was a real rivalry between these two learning centers. Anthony later sent Pergamum's library to Alexandria as a present to Cleopatra. The way to a woman's heart?

Pergamum was the home of Galen the physician and the center of the healing arts of Asclepius. It is even said that Asclepius was "a Pergamum god." The symbol for this god was the snake. BTW, take a look at modern medicine symbols and see the snake.

It also had a temple to Roma and the Emperor Augustus (A.D. 29) and was the administrative center of the Emperor's cult. Its loyalty to Rome was well known.

Pergamum was known for its worship and defense of the Greek pantheon. There was a huge Temple to Zeus on the acropolis that overlooked the whole city. It was shaped like a throne (Satan's throne?).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus calls the church at Pergamum to repent. Often repentance is something we talk about as happening at the beginning of someone's walk with Jesus. To what extent do you think repentance should be an ongoing part of a believer's life?

Why do you think so?

2. In Deuteronomy 30 Moses tells the people that as a nation they will have to return to following God after they abandon him. In Matthew chapter 3 John the Baptist calls the people of Israel to Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. And in the letters to the churches, Jesus calls believers to repent.

What has your experience with repentance played out?

Is repentance something you consciously think about, or not?

How could we incorporate confession and repentance into our walk with God?

3. What bad influences or teachings had infiltrated the church at Pergamum? (2:14- 15)

Any similar issues in the 21st century church?

4. As we engage the world around us, we need to make sure that we are influencing the world with the kingdom's values, not embracing the world's values. Give examples from your life where you have seen both these dynamics at play.

for instance - at work, what is success, showing our neighbors

5. How do we protect ourselves and protect our church from compromise? What should we do if we see compromise present in the life of someone we love? What would you want someone to do if they see compromise in your life?

6. The blessing in the book of Revelation is for those who not only listen to what is written, but observe what is said. For this reason, we always want to talk about how we are going to respond to what we've read.

**Close with praying for each other.**

## PERGAMUM EXTRA STUDY FOR YOU - IF YOU WANT:)

### 2:12

"The words of him who has the sharp, two-edged sword" This is the same reference to the glorified Jesus found in 1:16. It was an OT metaphor for YaHWeH (Isa. 11:4; 49:2). It is used in the NT for the penetrating power of the word of God (Rev. 2:16; 2 Thess. 2:8; Heb. 4:12).

### 2:13

"I know where you dwell" "Dwell" in the OT implied "to live permanently with." These believers faced strong local governmental and demonic pressure. Jesus knew them and their perilous situation. He was there with them.

"where Satan's throne is" There have been several possible interpretations of this phrase:

1. It could refer to the large throne of Zeus which was located in Pergamum.
2. It could refer to the god of healing, Asclepius, whose symbol was a serpent.
3. It seems that the whole city looked like a giant throne because of the Acropolis which stood hundreds of feet above the city itself.
4. It could be a reference to the Concilia, the local organization to promote emperor worship, which was very powerful in Pergamum.

Because of the historical context, either #1 or #4 seems best.

"you hold fast My name" This shows the significance of the name as representing the character of a person. Believers **trust** by calling on His name (John 1:12; 3:18; Rom. 10:9-13) and **worship** by calling on His name (Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 26:25) and **persevere** by calling on His name (John 17:11-12).

"and you did not deny My faith" During these early centuries of Christianity, and even today in certain societies, there was a real temptation to save one's prosperity or life by denying faith in Christ during physical or judicial trials. The church has always struggled with how to handle these apostates.

"Antipas, My faithful witness" We know nothing about this man. The title given him is the same that was used for Christ in Rev 5:1. The term "witness" can mean "martyr" (11:3; 17:6). Tertullian said that Antipas was roasted in a brazen bull, but this is simply later tradition.

### 2:14

"But I have a few things against you" Jesus had a negative statement for six of the seven churches. Righteous living in some areas does not excuse sin in others!

"you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam" Balaam was a prophet (Num. 24:2) who was lured into helping to compromise the people of Israel (Num. 22-25 and 31:16). He is condemned in both the OT and the NT (Num. 31:16; 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11). It is possible that the name Balaam in Hebrew meant "conqueror of the people" and the name Nicolaitans may have meant the same thing in Greek (Nicodemus of John 3 also has a similar meaning). This would identify these two groups as to their immoral practices (Jezebel, Rev 2:20).

Balaam's suggestion to Balak, King of Moab, was to involve the children of Israel in the fertility worship of Ba'al (Num. 25:1-3). There was a continuing cultural temptation to the sexual worship practices of first century pagans.

"eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality" These two sins involved pagan worship practices (Num. 25:1-3 and 31:16). Not only were there pagan meals where the food was sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:1-13), but often sexual immorality was the normal and

expected worship practice at these pagan assemblies. Human sexual activity was a supposed means of assuring the health and fertility of herds, crops, and society.

#### **2:15**

**"you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans"** Because of the similarity of the teachings of Balaam, the Nicolaitans (2:6), and Jezebel (2:20), all three of these refer to pagan, idolatrous worship practices. Believers must not revert to, or compromise with, the pagan cultures.

#### **2:16**

**"Therefore repent"** Remember what we said at Rev 2:5?

**"If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth"** There is an ongoing emphasis concerning repentance (2:5,16,22; 3:3,19). The coming could refer to temporal judgment against the church or to the Second Coming of Christ to judge the world. It is significant that the church as a whole was called on to repent (3:20; 2 Chronicles 7:14) because of the sins of some; if they did not, the consequences were corporate discipline!

#### **2:17**

**"To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna"** Manna was God's supernatural provision for the children of Israel during the Wilderness Wandering Period (Exod. 16:14-15,31; Ps. 78:17-33, especially v. 24). There have been several theories proposed to interpret this cryptic phrase:

1. It could refer to the Ark of the Covenant being brought out of hiding by Jeremiah from Mt. Nebo (II Maccabees 2:4-8) because it contained a jar of manna (Exod. 16:32-34; Heb. 9:4).
2. It could refer to the food of the new age of righteousness (II Baruch 29:8).

The exact reference is uncertain but it was obviously an allusion to the new age of the Spirit inaugurated by Christ. Some have even asserted that because of John 6:31-35, the hidden manna referred to Christ Himself. This is a good example of the difficulty in interpreting the specific details of this book which the contemporary hearer understood, but the exact reference has since been lost.

**"and I will give him a white stone"** This stone, also called Tessera, had many usages in the Ancient Near East.

1. it could be used for a ticket to special banquets
2. it could be used to vote for acquittal by a jury
3. it could be used as a symbol of victory for an athlete
4. it could be used to show the freedom of a slave.

In this context, #1 seems to be the best, referring to the Messianic Banquet (a common theme in Jewish apocalyptic literature).

**"with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it."**

This new name seems to be a symbol of the New Age or a title for the Messiah (Isa. 56:5; 62:2; 65:15). This new name is mentioned often in the book of the Revelation (c3:12; 14:1; 19:12,13,16; 22:4).



## CHURCH #4 THYATIRA 2:18-28

### OPEN WITH PRAYER & CATCH UP A BIT

18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 " 'I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. 20 But I have this

against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. 24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. 25 Only hold fast what you have until I come. 26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Thyatira was a smaller trade-oriented city. There are many records of its numerous and flourishing trade guilds, each with its own patron deity. It was located on a major road between Pergamum and Sardis which continued on to Philadelphia and Laodicea. It was famous for its woolen products. Lydia (Acts 16:14), a seller of purple cloth, was from this city. Thyatira was enlarged by Seleucus Nicator, who settled his Macedonian soldiers here. It had several temples to local deities - Tyrinnos (Apollo) the sun god - Artemis (Diana) the love goddess - Sibyl Sambathe a local female fortune teller.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Revelation is primarily about Jesus. As you browse through this letter to the church at Thyatira, what are some important things that you learn about Jesus our Lord? (see Heb.4:13)
2. The initial impression at the beginning of this letter in verse 19 is that this church was rather healthy spiritually and growing in various ways. Try to describe how these young believers may have been living out the positive traits identified.



3. But then there's verse 20. No church is problem free or sin free. It is easy for us to brush off what we consider "small sins." Why is it important to address even small sins?

Discuss and then read 1 Cor.5:6, Gal.5:9, Gal.6:7-10.

What have you seen in real life that supports this biblical idea?

4. Jesus rebuked the church for being tolerant toward wicked Jezebel (v.20). What may be some reasons why the church or church leaders tolerated Jezebel and her ungodly and misleading teachings; why do you think they were reluctant to confront wrongs?

How about us today as church members, believers in the community or even as parents--are we guilty at times of the same thing?

Why?

5. In v.21 it sounds like Jesus was tolerant. Why was Jesus "tolerant" or patient?

Jesus Christ is so good, patient and long-suffering. He gives us the opportunity to repent. What is true repentance and what would evidence that it is genuine?

After some discussion consider 2 Chronicles 7:14; Acts 19:18-20; Luke 22:60-62.

What actions show genuine repentance in these incidents?

What can we learn as to how we should practice tolerance in the church, at home?

7. Here's a possible summary statement on verses 25-28: *For the faithful there will be a reward.* The reward promised by Jesus seems to pertain to the victorious believers having a significant role in the coming millennial kingdom. This seems to be confirmed in 2 Timothy 2:11-12a; Rev.5:10; Rev.20:6.

Some or many at Thyatira had not fallen prey to Jezebel. Jesus had just one phrase for them: "Hold on to what you have" (verse 25). What do you do to help you stay on course spiritually?

**Close with praying for each other.**

## THYATIRA EXTRA STUDY FOR YOU - IF YOU WANT:)

### 2:18

"who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze" This was another title for Jesus taken from 1:14,15.

"The Son of God" It was very common to refer to Jesus as "Son." The most common title using this metaphor was "Son of man," which was Jesus' self-chosen title. The other term was "Son of God" which was a common designation for Jesus in John's writings (John 1:34,49; 5:25; 9:35; 10:36; 11:4,27; 19:7; 20:31; I John 3:8; 4:15; 5:5,10,12,13,20). A third use of "son" is found in the book of Hebrews (1:2; 12)

### 2:19

This verse is Jesus' acknowledgment of the ministry of the believers at Thyatira. They were active in kingdom work and getting even more active. This affirmation, however, did not excuse the heresy of v. 20.

### 2:20

"But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" This is an allusion to the Jezebel of I Kgs. 16:31-33; 2 Kgs. 9:21-22. Her teachings (v. 20) were similar to the Balaamites in v. 14 and the Nicolaitans in v. 15.

Jezebel was not rejected because she was a "woman" prophetess as some might suggest. There are many biblical examples of godly women leaders.

1. Miriam, Exod. 15:20
2. Deborah, Judges 4:4
3. Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14
4. Anna, Luke 2:36
5. Philip's daughters, Acts 21:9
6. Phoebe, Romans 16:1

### 2:21

God's mercy and patience as well as His justice are evident in vv. 21-23 (Rom. 2:5).

### 2:22

"I will throw her onto a sickbed" This is sarcasm related to her bed of adultery (teachings about immorality).

"great tribulation" 2:9 and the big end-time one at 7:14.

### 2:23

"I will strike her children dead" This does not refer to literal children, but to her followers (2:22; 2 John v. 1).

"And all the churches will know" This shows that the seven letters were to be read and the truth applied by all the churches, then and now.

"I am He who searches the mind and heart" The Bible asserts that God knows the motives and thoughts of all humans (Ps. 7:9, 26:2; 39:1; Pro. 24:12; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; Heb. 4:12-13; 8:27).

"I will give to each of you according to your works" This spiritual truth is presented so clearly in Gal. 6:7. We reap what we sow. This principle does not imply that salvation is by human effort (Eph. 2:8-9), but that those who have met God in Christ will live godly, loving, serving lives (3:12; Matt. 25:1-46; Eph. 2:10).

This is a spiritual principle. Humans break themselves on God's standards. We reap what we sow. This is true for believers (but does not effect salvation) and unbelievers (Job 34:11; Ps. 28:4; 62:12; Pro. 24:12; Eccl. 12:14; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; 25:31-46; Rom. 2:6; 14:12; I Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7-10; I Tim. 4:14; I Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2:23; 20:12; 22:12).

## 2:24

"the deep things of Satan" There are several theories relating to this phrase. It could refer

1. to a catch-phrase of Jezebel and her followers
2. to the Gnostic false teachers' emphasis on knowledge
3. to the initiation rites of the mystery religions of the Roman Empire
4. in an antithetical way, to "the deep things of God" (Rom. 11:33; I Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:18)

"I do not lay on you any other burden." This is an affirmation of the true believers in the city of Thyatira. They had an active, aggressive faith (v. 19).

## 2:25

"Only hold fast what you have until I come" Christ's followers must persevere (v. 20) in the middle of persecution, heresy and apathy. This is a command. Jesus is on His way; He is coming soon (2:16; 22:7,20). This is the hope and encouragement of every generation of Christians.

## 2:26-27

This is an allusion to Psalm 2:8-9, possibly with Isa. 30:14 and Jer. 19:11 added in. Jesus is the Messianic king. His kingdom is coming in worldwide power and consummation. It will be worth it all when His followers see Him!

## 2:26

"nations" The use of this term from the OT implies that it refers to those outside the covenant of Yahweh (the exception is 7:9). It becomes a way of referring to godless, wicked peoples (2:26; 5:9; 10:11; 11:2,9,18; 12:5; 13:7; 14:6,8; 16:19; 17:15; 18:3,23; 19:15; 20:8).

## 2:27

"even as I myself have received authority from my Father" Jesus has already been given all authority (Psalm 2; Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2: 9-11). Jesus' kingdom was present, but not yet consummated. But it's as good as here.

The OT quote in verse 27 is from Ps. 2:8 which initially referred to the Messiah (12:5; 19:15), but here it is used for believers who put their trust in Jesus Christ. They reign with Him.

## 2:28

"And I will give him the morning star" There have been several possible interpretations of this phrase:

1. it referred to a metaphor for Christ (Rev. 22:16)
2. it referred to intimate knowledge and fellowship with Christ (2 Pet. 1:19)
3. it referred to resurrection (Dan. 12:3)
4. it referred to the military Messiah mentioned in Num. 24:17
5. it referred to the joy of God's people (Job 38:7)
6. it referred to a phrase used of Satan in Isa. 14:12, but now for Christ